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Gray Meals... One Subject of Food Technology

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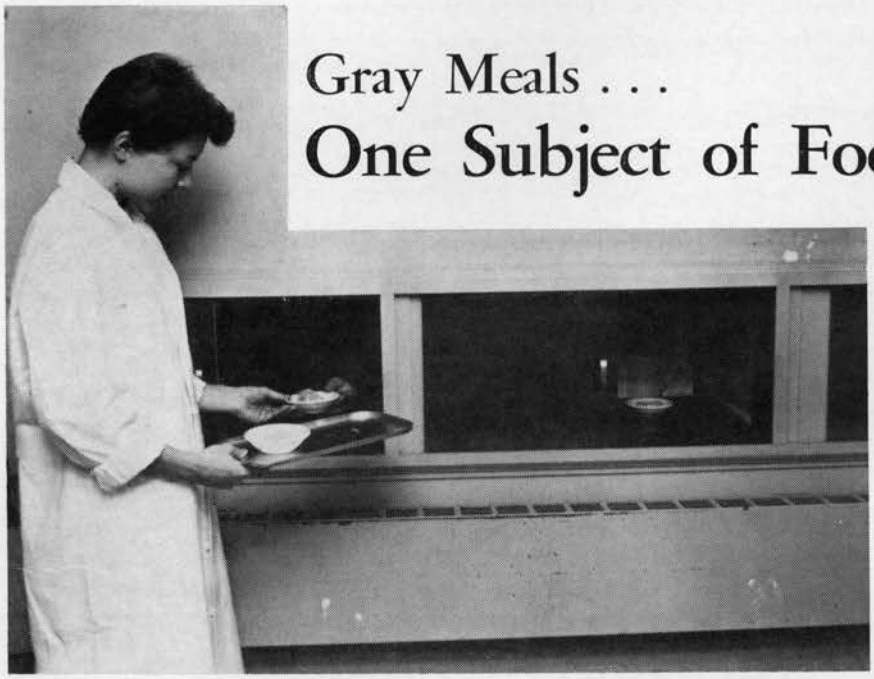
One Subject of Food Technology



Beth Hole, Iowa State graduate, passes trays of food to taste test panel members in a soundproof, specially lighted testing booth.

By Mary Ellen
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Gray eggs, gray bacon and a tall glass of cold, gray fruit juice sit before you.

This is hardly the greeting you want as you leap out of bed on Monday morning, but it's because some people have endured a menu like this that your breakfasts – and other meals – are attractive and palatable.

Lay people as well as trained scientists are responsible for food products which eventually go on the market. Important to the work of the Food Processing Laboratory of the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station is a group of volunteers who act as a taste panel when needed. They are relied on for indications of how the general public will feel about a product in question. Sound like fun? To get an idea of how the inspection proceeds, why don't you sit in and be a judge this time.

Lights remove color

You are taken to a soundproof room equipped with white, yellow and red lights. You are isolated from the other panel members by a three-sided booth and are asked to have a chair. The first test is ready to begin.

A tray with three samples of food is set in front of you. You are asked to indicate on a card which of the samples are alike and which of the three you prefer. You've never eaten gray meat before! You remember that the normal color of the meat has been neutralized by fluorescent lighting in order to eliminate the possibility of color influencing your judgment. It's hard to taste this strange food, but you try to be objective in your evaluation.

Second test for sugar

The second test is a little different. Five glasses of gray juice are lined up in front of you. You must rank them according to sweetness. You wonder if you have orange or tomato juice, but you bravely take a sip of each. Number five seems to have the most sugar. Or was it number three? Maybe the first was the one. . .

After a few of these typical experiments you may be willing to leave the final decisions to those who are used to menus in gray. With an appreciation of the preparation, experimentation and judging which has been done in this lab to provide improved food products for Iowa consumers, you go home to a juicy, brown steak, French fries, green peas, and golden apple pie. The calories seem much more worthwhile in technicolor.

All this and more experimenting is done behind the door of what seems to be just another temporary building. Here lies a world of research – labs, test kitchens and taste-test booths. This structure is located east of the Agronomy Building. Graduate and undergraduate students, professors and consumers call this their workshop and combine efforts to solve problems in animal husbandry, bacteriology, chemistry, dairy and food technology, engineering, entomology, home economics, horticulture and poultry husbandry.

Success not immediate

Food technology is the official title of the operations carried on. Discovery of what will be economical, safe and appetizing in food products provides employment for household equipment, food and nutrition and experimental foods majors, to name a few of the persons who comprise the staff. Dr. Agnes Carlin, a research worker and professor of food and nutrition at Iowa State, pointed out that achieving success in this area is not "instant." Satisfactory drying of eggs, for example, is a credit to the ingenuity of Iowa State scientists; work on this project began before World War II and was still going on in 1955.

Currently a topic of interest is the meat-type hog versus the fat-type hog. Unanswered are questions such as, "How does the tenderness, juiciness and flavor of the pork cuts from these two types of animals compare?" After careful evaluation, members of the Food Processing staff will pass the conclusions on to consumers.